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ABSTRACT

These two presentations discuss the National External Diploma Program (EDP) sponsored by the American Council on Education and its relationship to the Department of Labor's Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) report and to the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS). The first presentation focuses on the SCANS report and EDP, a competency-based, applied performance assessment system that credentials mature adults who have acquired many of their high school-level skills through their life and work experiences. The SCANS foundation skills that form the backbone of the EDP 65 competencies are listed. These skills are: (1) basic skills (reading, writing, arithmetic, and mathematics, and speaking and listening; (2) thinking skills (the ability to learn, to reason, to think creatively, to make decisions, and to solve problems; and (3) personal qualities (individual responsibility, self-esteem, self-management, sociability, and integrity). EDP's use of a consensus model to determine skills and level of demonstration required for mastery and EDP's combination of methods are described as illustrating SCANS recommendations. An attachment compares skills employers want and skills of EDP graduates. The second presentation considers EDP and CASAS. An attached conference paper describes EDP and how EDP skills are demonstrated. Discussion then centers on how EDP is similar to and different from the CASAS High School Program. Other topics include how EDP differs from the General Educational Development (GED) Tests, the need for an alternative to the GED Tests and CASAS, and implementation of EDP. An attachment compares and contrasts CASAS and EDP. (YLB)

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The External Diploma Program (EDP) and the SCANS Report

The External Diploma Program (EDP) and CASAS

Florence Harvey

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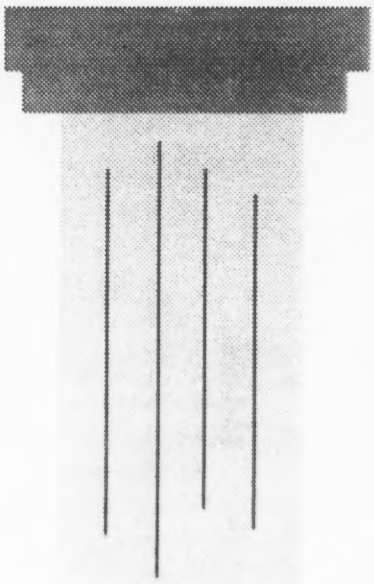

National External Diploma Program

The External Diploma Program (EDP) and the

SCANS Report

Presentation at AAACE Conference

November 1992

by

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Director

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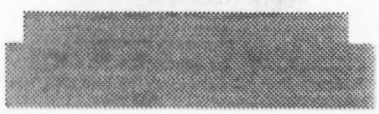

External Diploma Program and the SCANS Report

The Department of Labor's Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) recent report presents an ambitious agenda to address the the education and training needs of both the non-college-bound "forgotten half" and the needs of unemployed and under educated adults. In its final report (sidebar F), SCANS mentioned the National External Diploma Program(EDP) sponsored by the American Council on Education (ACE) as an important piece of the total educational assessment picture.

Although the American Council on Education through the GED Testing program is responsible for one out of every seven high school diplomas awarded in the United States every year, both GED Testing and ACE are aware that many adults are not being reached by the GED Tests. Adult education efforts in general currently only reach only about eight percent of their potential undereducated audience. This may be because many older learners--and especially those who were school dropouts--have very little interest in returning to the kind of traditional classroom or traditional testing arrangements which failed to meet their needs the first time. Yet, with eighty five percent of America's workforce already in the workplace today, not only young adults, but also these more mature high school drop-outs need to get "turned on" to more learning.

ACE's response to these impediments to adult's access to a second chance has been the dissemination, over the last two years, of the national External Diploma Program (EDP). This program is a competency-based, applied performance assessment system for out-of-school adults, especially attractive to the more mature adults not attracted to traditional models of testing and instruction.. EDP permits out-of-school adults to demonstrate, with the assistance of their employers, families, and supervisors, that they have mastered those skills needed as worker, citizens and family members. The EDP is designed to expand ACE's programming for adult learners and to complement the GED program, not replace it.

The comprehensive EDP assessment processes are fully described in the attached handout However, the assessment setting, procedures, and content are unique in several ways. First, EDP is not carried out in traditional setting but is completed at home and in confidential office visits under the eyes of assessment experts, and in also in work settings through evaluations of job supervisors. EDP is also based on a national standard of performance, giving credit for what the adult already has learned. Moreover, the SCANS foundation skills listed below and outlined in the SCANS Commission's reports form the backbone of the EDP 65 competencies.

These skills are:

BASIC SKILLS: Reading, writing, arithmetic and mathematics, speaking and listening,

THINKING SKILLS- the ability to learn, to reason, to think creatively, to make decisions, to solve problem

PERSONAL QUALITIES- Individual responsibility, Self-esteem (self-competence) and self-management, sociability and integrity.

All these skills, but the final two sociability and integrity, are measured in specific EDP assessment items or are demonstrated by the graduate in their mastery of the total program.

Also because EDP represents a high-school level assessment rather than a specific workplace-only test, it reflects a well-balanced adult experience..EDP addresses the adults' skill as a citizen and a family member, as well as a worker. The eight life skill themes that form the content of the assessment simulations include artistic and social awareness, as well as scientific and technological awareness.

As recommended by the SCANS evaluation report, standards should be set by consensus. The original 64 competencies generated by the developers of the EDP in 1974 at the Syracuse Research Corporation and the revised 65 competencies accomplished by ACE last year, both used the consensus model to determine those skills and the level of demonstration required for mastery. In evaluating assessment systems, the SCANS evaluation report also suggest that a balance of several types of assessment modes be used depending what would be most appropriate for measuring the specific skills. The EDP illustrates this process by using a combination of paper and pencil demonstrations, oral interviews, take-home projects, portfolio documentation, and research projects.

As a program, EDP has attracted older more mature adult who has not taken advantage of the other available high school options. EDP is based on an extensive pilot effort in New York State that, over the past decade, has been tried in over 10 states and awarded more than 10,000 high school diplomas to adults. The average age of the EDP graduate is 37 years. Equally promising is the fact that several states, unions, and employer groups are currently considering EDP. The states of North Dakota and Wisconsin recently have implemented the program, with South Carolina and Kentucky planning training for this winter. The Rotary Clubs of Utah have agreed to serve as community sponsors of the EDP with special emphasis on the needs of that state's smaller and medium-sized employers. In Indiana, the Indianapolis Network for Employment and Training represents another partnership hoping to bring the EDP option to the Hoosier State.

The EDP provides a framework for validating academic strengths within the context of job and life skills. As the SCANS report suggests improving the schools through a "learning a living"system, EDP seeks to empowers those adult who have been "learning through living." The goal is for adults, especially those who have historically not had a positive school experience, to see themselves as part of a learning process that lasts a lifetime.

Sidebar F

Pieces of the Standards and Assessment Puzzle

Several groups, organizations, and states are already at work on major elements of a new assessment system. Among the projects in progress are the following:

New Standards Project. This effort, based at the University of Pittsburgh and the National Center on Education and the Economy in Rochester, New York, is funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trust. It serves as a model for much of the national standard-setting and assessment activity. The project has begun work with 17 states and local school districts around the country to show how students can be helped to achieve high standards by setting clear targets for instruction and by providing the extra help and resources to those who need them to achieve the standards.

College Entrance Examination Board. The College Board is developing Pacesetter, an array of secondary school syllabi, related assessments, and professional development activities for teachers. The syllabi spell out for all students standards to raise student expectations and improve performance. The program is being developed in cooperation with leading disciplinary associations and educational practitioners at all levels. The initial offering in mathematics is projected for 1993, to be followed by English, world history, science, and foreign languages.

Educational Testing Service. ETS is developing WORKLINK, an electronic information system linking local schools and employers. WORKLINK is an "employer friendly" record to make school performance count in the workplace. It provides to employers (1) a reformatted high school transcript that is easy to interpret; (2) work-skills assessment covering such aptitudes as reading and using manuals, everyday math, and writing skills; (3) information on job-related behavior, including punctuality, timely work completion, and willingness to follow directions; and (4) information on work experience and out-of-school training. Students will be able to use their records as a résumé, and employers will be able to locate potential employees from a computerized WORKLINK data base managed locally. (The résumé shown in Exhibit K is based, in part, on WORKLINK.)

American College Testing Service. ACT is developing Work Keys, a system for profiling, assessing, and teaching employability skills. The system includes a series of work-related assessments covering reading, writing, computation, problem solving, and reasoning; and SCANS-like interpersonal skills (e.g., negotiation, motivation, and oral communication). Employers will profile their jobs, individuals will be profiled on skills, and instruction will be provided, all based on a Work Keys skills-matrix. Work Keys is being developed in cooperation with the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, the National Association of Community and Junior Colleges, the National Association of State Directors of Vocational/Technical Education Consortium, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and advisory panels from five participating states.

American Council on Education. ACE, which sponsors the GED tests that permit more than 400,000 adults each year to earn a high school diploma, is developing a new, competency-based, performance-driven, assessment effort to award diplomas, the national external diploma program (EDP). Expected to be available in 1992, EDP will permit adults to demonstrate skills acquired in work and life, including many of the SCANS foundation skills and competencies: communication; problem solving; teamwork; entry-level job skills; awareness of social, public, and scientific issues; technological competence; and the ability to manipulate, synthesize, and use data in context.

State and Local Initiatives. Along with these national efforts, many states and localities are developing their own standards and replacing statewide programs of testing with assessment systems. California is one of the leading states in these efforts, along with Connecticut, Kentucky, Maryland, New York, and others. The Council of Chief State School Officers has made the "School-to-Work Transition" a top priority for the next three years and established a national consortium of states to develop new assessment systems. One group is working on work readiness. Efforts are also proceeding in local districts. The Pittsburgh Public Schools, for example, have adopted a framework of Career/Life Skill Competencies similar to SCANS, and Los Angeles will warranty that all of its graduates are proficient in the SCANS know-how.

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IN THE WORKPLACE, EMPLOYERS WANT THESE SKILLS:	*EDP GRADUATES HAVE LEARNED TO:*
• Organizational ability	• Be responsible for task management
• Leadership/teamwork	• Identify resources; solicit and evaluate services received
• Self-esteem	• Be self-confident learners
• Goal setting and motivation	• Self-pace, self-direct, and persist
• Personal and career evaluation	• Self-develop and analyze own job skills; write resume; interview for jobs
• Ability to learn	• Learn from mistakes; practice self-directed and self-reliant learning

IN THE WORKPLACE, EMPLOYERS WANT THESE SKILLS:	*EDP GRADUATES HAVE LEARNED TO:*
• Oral communication	• Communication in oral interviews
• Listening	• Listen and respond to stimulus questions
• Written communication	• Write letters, resumes, and paragraphs
• Reading	• Read task directions and items (range from 7th - 13th grade) reading
• Computation	• Apply mathematics in context of work and home use
• Critical thinking/problem solving	• Do problem solving in real life simulations

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE EXTERNAL DIPLOMA PROGRAM (EDP) AND CASAS

What is the National External Diploma Program?

In 1990, the Center for Adult Learning and Educational Credentials at the American Council on Education (the home of the GED Testing Service) added a new option for adult high school completion called the National External Diploma Program (EDP). EDP is a competency-based, applied performance high school diploma program that credentials mature adults who have acquired many of their high school level skills through their life and work experiences. EDP serves those adults who prefer to learn their missing academic skills in a context that is relevant to their lives as parents, citizens and workers.

How are EDP skills demonstrated?

Like CASAS, the EDP academic skills, such as communication, computation, problem solving, reading and critical thinking, are embedded in a applied performance assessment that looks like a real life task. For example, an adult might demonstrate reading, writing, and critical thinking by doing a life project such as searching for a new apartment. Aspects of this project might include reading the lease, writing a letter of complaint to the landlord, and budgeting the rent from a simulated monthly salary. Each adult also receives credit for a vocational or specialized skill such as home management, learned at home or through training programs.

How is EDP similar to CASAS? How is it different?

Like CASAS, EDP is competency based, assessment system that drives instruction and uses life skill materials as the context of testing. Unlike CASAS, EDP is not used within a classroom or with a teacher, but drives the adult learner to seek instruction separate from the assessment center. The EDP demands a 100% mastery of all competencies, but allows for the adult to self-pace the learning and the demonstration of that learning. Parts of the assessment (called "tasks") are done at home and parts are assessed in a series of private office visits (called "spot check/interviews"). Like the CASAS secondary instructional system, EDP also awards the adult a traditional diploma.

Since there is no formal instruction in EDP, adults needing help are referred to existing community resources. Here is one area where EDP and CASAS complement each other. Unlike preparation for the GED tests, EDP offers the opportunity for CASAS teachers to continue to use life skill and workplace materials to teach EDP referrals missing skills until all the competencies are mastered. Appropriate referrals to EDP can also occur when an adult studying within the CASAS instructional programs reach the GED prep level. After the student enrolls in EDP, the CASAS teacher can continue to serve that adult as her or his community resource while the student works through the EDP process.

How does the EDP differ from the GED Tests?

EDP is criterion referenced, not norm referenced like the GED Tests. The EDP criteria include 65 general competencies and one individualized vocational or specialized skill. While the GED Tests are referenced to the high school curriculum and normed on graduating seniors, the EDP competencies look life life tasks and were established by examining the skills expected of a competent high school graduate.

Why a third alternative?

Although the GED Tests and the CASAS High School Program serve many learners, especially younger adults more oriented to a curriculum-based learning experience, EDP provides an alternative for adults not served by either of the other options The average age of the EDP graduates is 37; the average age of GED graduates is 24, with the average age even younger for graduates of classroom-based secondary systems. Not surprisingly, among high school drop-outs, many mature adults are test phobic, all wish to be recognized for their real life achievements, and most learn best in a life skill context. EDP is an alternative that allows adults who formerly saw themselves as school failures to see themselves as continuous and lifelong learners.

How will EDP be implemented in my locale?

To implement the national External Diploma Program a local school board must agree to grant a traditional diploma to adults who master the EDP competencies. The staff for the EDP must also be trained by the American Council on Education in an intensive 3 1/2 day training workshop and evaluated a year later. Many local school boards are putting EDP in place through partnerships with local businesses, community organizations, and social service providers. For more information about this program and how it might be implemented in your locale, call Florence Harvey, Director of the External Diploma Program, at 202-939-9475.

CASAS

Competency-based

Assessment system

Life skill context

Learner-paced to Mastery

EDP

Competency-based

Assessment system

Life skill context

Learner-paced to Mastery

CASAS

Pre-testing
Post-testing

Adult Basic Education (ABE)

High School Component

Used in conjunction with instruction

Facilitates teaching and learning

EDP

Pre-testing: Diagnostic
Post-testing: Assessment

High School Level

ABE Component: Diagnostic

Used to refer to instruction

Drives learning but not teaching

ASSESSMENT SYSTEM:

CASAS →→→ CASAS →→→ CASAS →→→

→→→DIAGNOSTIC →→→ ASSESSMENT →→→

→→→ GRADUATION